

Joanna Maria Piechowiak

"Praca, konsumpcjonizm i nowi ubodzy", Zygmunt Bauman, Kraków 2006 : [recenzja]

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Tekst jest udostępniony do wykorzystania w ramach dozwolonego użytku.

Joanna Maria Piechowiak (rev.): Zygmunt Bauman, *Praca, konsumpcjonizm i nowi ubodzy*, [Work, Consumerism, and the Underclass], Wydawnictwo WAM, Kraków 2006, pp. 212.

You cannot leave the world as it is.

Janusz Korczak

In every era, in each society, in all economic and political systems there are some people who are poor. Who are they, and what kind of people are they in the post-modern society? The development dynamics forces social studies to make a continuous actualization and close reference to the issues of the moment and contemporary practical problems. Zygmunt Bauman's publication, in spite of its editing in Great Britain in 2004, and in Poland two years later, still concerns one of the most ponderable problems, which one may encounter. That is poverty, and even the dramatic lack of job, and, in consequence, rising in a high speed poverty of all nations, as well as single social groups.

Zygmunt Bauman's biography, his previous publications, and scientific achievements¹ make him one of the most noble authorities as for the issues of postmodernism and considerate nation, so-called, Welfare State. The book was published by WAM, one which is the oldest Catholic publishing house in Poland. The author bases mainly on a sociological analysis, but comes to the conclusions, one which is similar to those

we find when reading John Paul II. What seems to be surprising is the fact that similar conclusions reach the Head of Church and the laic scientist. The adhesive occurs to be highlighting, in both of the cases, the fact of non-humanitarian globalization processes, and the place of an individual in the out-of-humanitarian world as well as deserved dignity. What is it *Praca, konsumpcjonizm i nowi ubodzy* [Work, Consumerism, and the Underclass]? Maybe – according to Andrzej Wojtasik, a translator into Polish – *it is calling for taking care of those who are forgotten by the world.*

The post-industrial epoch has generated new meanings of the notion *work, consumerism and poverty*. The author writes in the notions into a complex multidimensional process of the increase as for the international division of work, growth of the turnover in the international trade, capital transfer increase, as well as the transfer of people, technology, and goods, culture interweaving, and the growth of dependency between countries, that is globalization. The book consists of three parts to make easier for a reader the topic understanding and placing. The first part includes the relation, one which is a reason-effect relation of the described events, as well as it becomes a subject analysis attempt. The second part presents the influence of the events on society. Whereas the third part is a personal and original attempt to answer the previous questions.

The very clear division into parts and chapters allows one to follow the author's understanding. The first chapter concerns

¹ He has been awarded prestigious prizes several times, among others the Adomo prize.

the meaning of work etiquette, the next one is on the transformation from *the manufacturers society into consumers society*, that is from the work etiquette to the consumption aesthetics. The third part consists of a description of the considerate nation evolution, its further deformation and finally the failure and the close relation between the changes in society and the attitude towards the problem of the poor, and poverty itself. Subsequently the fourth and fifth chapter present such social categories as *new-poor*, *underclass* or even unemployment in the globalized world. At the end Zygmunt Bauman takes into consideration the theoretical consequences of present poor people treatment and their role in the society.

The history and work etiquette depict it as a normal state, whereas non-working as something abnormal. The very issue conclusion proves placing the employed higher in the social hierarchy than the unemployed. Considering work as one of the most essential values at the same time out-values people who, owing to several reasons, do not take it. At the beginning of the industrial epoch the existing pressure of work became the reason of human instrumentalization depriving him or her of any freedom. The work etiquettes is in fact the slogan: "work very hard, day by day, and hour after hour, even when you cannot see any reason to make such an effort, and when you cannot perceive the meaning of the effort" (p. 26). What were the aims of the work etiquettes? Bauman points out two major ones: firstly, it was to meet the needs of factory workers, secondly, pay for the unemployed, that is the

greatest problem of post-traditional society. Work was worth respecting and paying glory, but at the same time, it became a limitation and burden, not only the physical one.

Presently we live in the era of consumerism, which means using and damaging objects. As previously the productive society, the consumer society now occupies itself with consumerism, however the difference seems to be the attitude to it, and to work as well. In the post-industrial epoch each man is an individual being, who takes care on their own of meeting one's consumer needs. People seem to be out-rooted and do not feel like possessing roots, nations become more and more scattered, and the awareness of living in a *global village* gives the feeling of freedom of choice.

Who are the poor people in the given reality? The author highlights social and psychological issues, not the obvious ones, that is the material ones. "Poverty is equal to exemption from something which is depicted as normal life" (p. 77). What is the reason for that? We deprive poor people, that is those who cannot come up with the consumer society standards, of the right to live without stress, sufferings and humiliation. We make them experience shame and fault. Moved to the social margin they are treated like out of order and under-consumers.

However, as Bauman points out, the poor and the rich live in the same world. When there is the an economic growth or a recession, the poor become even poorer, and the rich richer. There is no limit for the

rich, *sky is the limit*, however the poor seem to become more and more restricted. The greater the poverty, the more the welfare is contrasted with it. But what shall one do when the poor are too lazy to meet their lives' needs?

The answer to the dilemma could be a nation of welfare, a considerate nation, which is responsible for providing a citizen with worthy existence. The requirement of taking care of the poor by the state in several countries, occurred to be a contemporary utopia and resulted in an economical breakdown and crisis. Even in the last bastion of the system, one which may be situated between the modern and post modern country, that is among others in Sweden, the government seems to resign from the aid programmes. Presently the majority of citizens is satisfied with the independence and the state of relying only on themselves. They are responsible for their status.

There is a short line between being unemployed and useless. The useless are unnecessary, unnecessary are needless. The rest of society think that it would be better if they did not exist. They are completely useless and became a financial and social problem. The poor, underclass are the inner enemy, who infringes the values which are thought to be proper, and who becomes a risk as for the safety. Poverty, in a natural way, is associated with crime, which allows the extermination and isolation of those who are not sure to be people. still

The production of human remains is growing, there are fewer and fewer spec-

tives for the underclass. The low position of those who were exempted from society is only their fault, and no one else should be blamed for that. In the very moment there appears the most vital question: Should we leave the problem of the poor, and let them be on their own? The author can see for them a possibility of their creation a new quality of work etiquette, one which would be suited to the conditions of the post-industrial society. The separation of the right to financial means from the job sale could occur to be a chance, if not for the liquidation of the unemployment and poverty problem, but at least for the limit of the rise of the human remains.

Is this a next kind of utopia, similarly to the considerate nation? One cannot work it out right now, but it could be taken into consideration as one of the solutions. Those who possess more should share it with those who are poorer. What is more, they should do it on the ground of some noble reasons, and not because of the duty imposed on them by the country.

The book by Zygmunt Bauman is, above all, an example that we can still refer to human feelings and social sensitivity. It is a valuable and actual transfer, which is to make the reader think over not only the problem of poverty, but also the quality of life concentrated on consumerism and receiving more and more without giving something back. At the very end there appears one more question: Can we trust people?

Joanna Maria Piechowiak